

Review for THE BIG BLUES FESTIVAL @ The Atkinson, Southport, Merseyside - Oct 2017

<https://www.theatkinson.co.uk/special-event/big-blues-festival-2017/>



Another excellent '**Big Blues Festival**' this year, at the highly acclaimed Atkinson Arts Centre in the centre of Southport. Held over two days, it gave a good variety of blues based artists on three stages.

Friday

Young and talented '**Benjamin Bassford**' from Mansfield opened the Festival on the Theatre Stage. Ben earned his place on the main stage after winning the vote from last year's Little Blues Acoustic Stage, sponsored by Blues Matters magazine. Playing a mix of excellent self penned numbers of blues and acoustic roots, he showcased his guitar skills on resonator and acoustic guitar as well as his superb vocal talent. The audience were well entertained and he is an ambassador for the youth of blues roots.



Benjamin Bassford - photo courtesy of Jan Fialkowski

<https://www.benjaminbassford.com/>

Upping the tempo on the Theatre Stage were the brilliant jump jive rockers **'The Revolutionaires'**, a high energy six piece band from the Northeast. Fronting the band on vocals, guitar and harmonica was the charismatic, full on performer, Ed Stephenson. With plenty of brass input from trumpets, excellent keys and upright bass, they gave their own individual take on 1950's rhythm and blues and rock and roll, and played a mix of classics from Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Etta James, Big Joe Turner and more. They certainly were a crowd pleasers and it was a great way to finish the evening.



The Revolutionaires - photo courtesy of Jan Fialkowski

<http://www.the-revolutionaires.co.uk/>

Saturday

Opening on the Little Blues Acoustic Stage in the foyer was **'Stoney Broke'**. The Scottish, blues and soul singer songwriter Stoney Broke, aka Jake Scott, defined his musical talent with an eclectic mix of acoustic numbers which were well performed and enjoyed by the small but appreciative audience.



Stoney Broke - <http://www.stoneybrokemusic.co.uk/>

The first band on the Studio Stage today were the impressive '**Chris Bevington Organisation**'. From the Stoke area, they are certainly a band with a 'big' sound. As an eight piece collective, they played a mix of blues, rock, soul and jazz with many of the tracks taken from their two impressive albums. Fronting the band on great vocals and guitar was Scott Ralph, with keys, trumpet, sax, bass, drums and backing vocals. The big band sound was full on, opening the afternoon with 'The House Is A Rockin'', which certainly got the party started. Continuing with the soulful 'Watch Over Me', 'Boogie Man' with great keys and trumpet input and 'Express Train', an excellent blues number with super sax, could things get better? Time for the backing vocalists Sarah Miller and Kate Robinson to take the lead on a fabulous take of 'Purple Rain' just beautiful. Following, the brilliant rocky blues '61 & 49' and blues shuffle 'Better Start Cooking' from their last album of the same name. Hitting the classics with a great version of the Ray Charles 'I Don't Need Know Doctor' and Buddy Guy's 'She's Out There Somewhere', they ended the set with a blues shuffle, rocking it up for the encore. An outstanding band in all respects. They have a third album in the mix, which will be released early in 2018.



Chris Bevington Organisation - <http://www.chrisbevingtonorganisation.com/>

The UKBlues Challenge winners '**LaVendore Rogue**' were next to take the stage in The Studio, certainly a 'once seen never forgotten' band. From Essex, the band is fronted by the flamboyant JoJo Burgess, delivering fantastic vocals, aided by Joel Fisk who is one of the best electric and slide guitarists on the circuit today. Stephen 'Cupsey' Cutmore keeps the rhythm in check on drums and percussion, Warren Lynn on keys and James Payze on bass. Playing their individual take on blues inspired Americana in a mix of their own material they kicked off with 'Honey Murder'. They dedicated the Charlie Patten's poignant blues 'Oh Death' to the performer and friend Jeremiah Marques who died recently, which was carried out to perfection with Joel playing superb slide. A great take on their classic 'Dead Man's Chest', then on to some classy country with Joel on acoustic guitar. Giving Warren on Hammond a chance of a solo on their own 'Chocolate Cake' was superbly sung by JoJo as was the macabre 'The Chemist'. They finished the accomplished set with the Stones classic 'Get Off My Cloud' a great end to a brilliant set.



LaVendore Rogue - <http://lavendorerogue.com/>

Down on the Little Blues Acoustic Stage was the young '**Reece Hillis**' from Scotland. Playing a mix of acoustic soul blues, he worked hard with vocals and proficient guitar work.



Reece Hillis - <https://reecehillismusic.com/>

Back to the Studio Stage a great performance yet again from talented trio, the magical '**Wille & The Bandits**' from Cornwall. They have an fantastic original sound which cannot be categorised as they cross the boundaries of so many genres, with elements of blues, and roots rock falling into the 'alternative', with a freshness of sound which sets them apart giving them their own distinctive style. Fronting the band was Will Edwards on ethereal and raw vocals, guitar and slide guitar, Matt Brooks on six string bass and also bespoke upright bass playing some breathtaking solos and finally superb percussionist and drummer, Andrew Naumann. Beginning with a slide drenched opener it set the scene for the rest of the performance with numbers from their current album 'Steal' and from previous albums. Included were the haunting 'Scared Of The Sun', their own take on Peter Green's 'Black Magic Woman', the beautiful and powerful 'Mammon', and the highlight of the set 'Angel' with the amazing bass solo from Matt. Wille & The Bandits are certainly a breath of fresh air.



Wille & The Bandits - <https://www.willeandthebandits.com/>

The acoustic blues duo '**George & George**' who are George Shovlin and George Lamb from the Northeast, were performing on the Little Blues Acoustic Stage. Excellent playing with that traditional bluesy feel, along with their good humour made them a popular choice with the transient audience. They were winners of the vote and will now appear on the main stage at the next Big Blues Festival in 2018.



George and George - <http://www.georghovlinandtheradars.com/>

On the Studio Stage moving away from the 'blues', were the Stomp and Holler band '**The Jar Family**', hailing from the Northeast. With multi guitars, banjo and percussion and some great vocals they gave a rousing and entertaining performance which was well received by the audience.



The Jar Family - <http://thejarfamily.com/>

Moving to the Theatre Stage and the last act of the festival, we were welcomed by the big band swing sound of the charismatic '**Mike Sanchez Band**'. With larger than life Mike Sanchez originally from the Midlands, on grand piano supported by two saxes, upright bass, drums and guitar it was a real cabaret performance of swing, blues boogie and rockabilly with some story telling. No messing enjoyable entertainment .



Mike Sanchez Band - photo courtesy of Jan Fialkowski
<http://www.mikesanchez.com/>

The last act on the Little Blues Acoustic Stage was a talented young man from Scotland, singer songwriter '**Gus Munro**'. With electric guitar he gave an excellent performance showcasing his guitar and vocal talents with a style of music described a 'Scottish Folk Blues'. It was certainly different and caught the attention of many.



Gus Munro - <http://www.gusmunro.com/>

So there ended the wonderful Big Blues Festival for another year. Thanks go to **Emma Lloyd** and the team at the Atkinson for all their hard work and organisation, that kept the wheels turning throughout the weekend. Thanks also go to all the bands who played, making this big blues festival even 'bigger'.

Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer
<http://www.facebook.com/lancsbluesarchive> <http://www.ukblues.org/>